

How Delegates Make ICSOM Work

Adapted from the original article by Frederick Zenone, ICSOM Chairman, 1980-1986

For over forty years the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians has been a major force in the life of the American orchestra musician. Its most visible institutional function, and the one which gives it momentum throughout the year, is the convening of delegates at the annual conference. To give this conference focus, it is helpful to clarify the duties and responsibilities of the ICSOM delegate.

We delegates are musicians who perform in the symphony, opera, and ballet orchestras of this country. We remain performers even as we undertake additional responsibilities of labor organization. Each of us is in a position to know first hand the requirements of orchestral performers, to understand the nature of a musician's artistic and material life. This experience that each delegate brings to and takes from the conference is something that we all share.

We have responsibilities to two organizations. We have obligations to our individual orchestras, and we have obligations to ICSOM as a national organization of many orchestras. Ideally these responsibilities are always parallel.

To our home orchestras we are responsible for teaching and sharing the knowledge we gain about negotiation, pension plans, fringe benefits, working conditions, electronic media activity, and many other topics. We are responsible for gathering and reporting specific information our orchestra directs us to get from other orchestras about working conditions, artistic matters, labor-management relations and their implementation. We are responsible for informing the conference of the concerns of our own orchestras.

To ICSOM we are responsible for carrying out the administrative duties of collecting and processing ICSOM dues, wage chart information, AFM Strike Fund contributions, and conductor evaluations. We are responsible for preparing reports for *Senza Sordino* and the *ICSOM Bulletin*. We must provide accurate information for the *ICSOM Directory*. We are responsible for maintaining liaison with major committees and with other orchestras.

These are the workaday duties that keep our organization operating. But the real life and energy of our organization is the reciprocal exchange of ideas among orchestras and between each orchestra and ICSOM leadership. Orchestra-L and Delegate-L were developed to facilitate this communication.

It is each delegate's responsibility to establish within the member orchestra the dialogue and discussion that enables the delegate to effectively represent that orchestra at the conference and throughout the year. Delegates are constantly asked for opinions on issues. The conference wants to hear not only the individual's personal opinion but also

that of the orchestra represented. If we have been listening to our orchestra, and if we have been convincing with our colleagues, these opinions are likely to be the same; if they are not, the difference must be noted. It is the delegate's responsibility to try to convince the conference of the validity of that opinion, but the delegate must also be willing to share conference decisions with the orchestra back home. We must be willing to take back convincing and informed opinion that may be different from that with which we came.

Too often delegates return to their orchestras with the message, "I have been to the annual ICSOM conference and I am convinced." This is not a position that will enlighten or persuade an orchestra. Few people at the conference or at home will act as a result of such a statement. Because we are a rank-and-file organization, and because we do not make agreement a condition of membership, our single most effective tool is persuasion. We must have the power to persuade and the willingness to be persuaded.

We have been designated by our orchestras as leaders and activists. ICSOM asks us to affirm and reaffirm that position throughout the year. We are the voice in our orchestras of American orchestra musicians united on a national level. We are the persons who must constantly examine the effect our orchestra's action will have on other orchestras. Each of us must be a leader, an organizer, a conduit of information, the conscience of a movement of caring and involved and active musicians who insist on improving the institutions through which we produce our art.